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Planning for a Community Food Preservation Center

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Department of Agriculture

A broadcast by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Wednesday, January 14, 1942, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, over stations associated with the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company.

--ooOoo--

JOHN BAKER:

Here in Washington we have news on the home front. Ruth Van Deman's here, and by the look in her eye I'm sure she has another bagful of suggestions gathered from the home economists of the Department of Agriculture.

Ruth, I think you said all thoughts today lead toward the community food preservation center.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Right, John ... planning for a community food preservation center. D'you have one in your town?

BAKER:

I don't know whether we do or not. In fact I'm not just sure that I know what you mean by a community food preservation center.

VAN DEMAN:

I doubt very much whether you have one in your town... You're too suburban over there on the Virginia side of the Potomac ... not near enough to the grass roots.

BAKER:

What do you mean --- not near enough to the grass roots? There are more grass roots than vegetables in my garden.

VAN DEMAN:

I had a sneaking suspicion-- --.

BAKER:

But you didn't dare say it.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, a community food preservation center is a place to save all surplus vegetables and fruits - no fooling.

BAKER:

We may get together this spring and have a community garden - dig and plant, and weed and harvest for victory.

VAN DEMAN:

And fight cutworms and Japanese beetles. ... Well, if you do all that to a finish, maybe the women of the neighborhood will have something to can and conserve for victory too. The idea of a community food preservation center is not

(Over)

VAN DEMAN: (Contd.)

to let a pound of food go to waste this year. If there's more than can be used fresh, then preserve it and store it some way to eat later when fresh supplies are scarce.

BAKER:

I get it. These community food preservation centers are the logical follow-up to gardens-for victory.

VAN DEMAN:

They are. Just the way 2 and 2 make 4.

BAKER:

That's all I wanted to know, just where they place in our whole big food production, food supply picture.

VAN DEMAN:

They're not intended to take the place of anything now in operation. As I understand it, the commercial canneries will be operating to capacity this coming summer.

BAKER:

Unless all plans fail they will. The new food-for-freedom goals to be announced on Friday count on definite quantities of certain canned foods - to feed our military forces ... to ship to our allies ... and to use as supplies for the great majority of people who have no ground to grow any of their own - people who can't even get near a grass root.

VAN DEMAN:

And there's a lot of food produced in home gardens that can't be calculated in national goals either. And sometimes tons of food from big truck farms and orchards go to waste for lack of people to handle it at just the right time.

BAKER:

So you're recommending that people in communities where there may be surplus foods, get together now and lay their plans to save all possible food next summer.

VAN DEMAN:

In your usual straight-to-the point fashion, John, you've hit the nail right on the head. And I hope that glint in your eye doesn't mean that you think we're shelling our peas before they're planted.

BAKER:

No, no, not at all. I was just thinking the victory garden planters better get busy too ... better get their planting plans well outlined so there would be plenty of peas to shell...plenty to eat fresh...plenty to can. Might be a good idea for the garden planters to hold a joint session some time soon with the ladies of the food preservation center.

VAN DEMAN:

Second the motion. Of course one of the questions coming up very soon is about canning equipment. Now the military needs for all metals are so far beyond anything we first foresaw, that we may have to get along with the existing canning equipment, and not get any more new.



BAKER:

Aren't there thousands of pressure cookers that might be used for canning, pushed back on pantry shelves, more or less unused?

VAN DEMAN:

Probably so. That's why we suggest that a community form a committee now to find out what steam pressure outfits are available--and get them looked over--new parts ordered, if necessary--get the pressure gauges checked, to be sure they're accurate. There may be some large canning equipment left over from WPA or other community canning activities of a few years ago. Now's the time to look it up and make sure it's in good working order before the spring rush comes.

BAKER:

You know, Ruth--all this talk about steam pressure cookers gets me kinda worried. You don't have to have a steam pressure cooker to can everything, do you?

VAN DEMAN:

Everything but fruits and tomatoes. They do better in a boiling water-bath. But beans, peas, corn, all non-acid vegetables and meats if they're canned at all, have to be done under steam pressure to be safe.

BAKER:

What about containers to can food in?

VAN DEMAN:

As I understand it, there'll be plenty of glass for jars. Tin for cans is of course a problem, and so is rubber for new jar rings. There won't be zinc for new tops for the mason jars. But I have faith in American inventive genius. I'm sure manufacturers will find a way to give us good containers with whatever materials are available. We've been the greatest nation of home canners in the world, and I don't think we're going to be stopped now - not when saving food means victory.

BAKER:

There are other ways to preserve food besides canning.

VAN DEMAN:

Very true. There's the ultra modern way of quick freezing and storing in community freezer lockers. And there's the older-than-history way of drying food in the sun or near the fire.

BAKER:

What about putting stuff down in brine?

VAN DEMAN:

Right. That's another old timer that has no rival for certain products.

BAKER:

To wit, sauerkraut.

VAN DEMAN:

And dill pickles. They're a salted fermented vegetable too, you know.

BAKER:

No, I didn't know, but I still think they're good eating... And what about storage cellar for root vegetables? That hasn't gone out of style, has it?

VAN DEMAN:

Not at all - especially in the North and West - not so good in some parts of the South. But it's certainly a way to use wherever it's at all practicable... That's the job for the community now - to explore all food preservation methods in use at present and find out about others that might be used.

John, I don't know whether you've seen our handbook on "Community Food Preservation Centers"?

BAKER:

I've heard about it.

VAN DEMAN:

Here's a copy in case you'd like to pass the word along to our Farm and Home friends.

BAKER:

Is this available to anyone who writes to the Bureau of Home Economics?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, anyone who wants to organize a community food preservation center. As you see just leafing it through, it tells how to get the advisory board organized, how to equip and supervise the center, how to insure that the foods preserved will be safe and sanitary and good to eat. This handbook pools the experience of a lot of experts called in from the States and other agencies to advise on every recommendation given.

BAKER:

I like the way it starts.

"Community food preservation - families getting together in a neighborly way to can, brine, preserve, or store an oversupply for coming need - is as old as America and as new as all-out defense.

"In normal, peaceful years, it is one of this country's thrifty means of securing an all-the-year-round supply of good food. It has been proved a good way of tiding over droughts and depressions and meeting such food emergencies as are caused by floods and hurricanes. Now comes a new chapter in the food preservation story, the rallying of all America to conserve the Nation-building food supply as a vital part of our national defense."

VAN DEMAN:

And that was written last fall...long before Pearl Harbor. We'd say it with more force now.

BAKER:

Well, Farm and Home friends - if you'd like a copy of the bulletin on "Community Food Preservation Centers", write to U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.